

Chapter Nineteen
Studies in the Epistle of Paul to the Romans
Four Principles of Divine Justice
Judgment According To Works

“⁵ But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; ⁶ Who will render to every man according to his deeds: ⁷ To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: ⁸ But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, ⁹ Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; ¹⁰ But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile” (Romans 2:5-10).

Romans 2:5 begins the second of four principles of divine justice. God will judge “every man according to his deeds.” Although it is a universal principle, it is applied individually. Every individual will be judged according to his deeds.

Romans 2:5 is a connecting link between judgment according to truth and judgment according to works. The truth we believe or reject determines our faith (practice and vision of reality). The person that rejects the truth about sin and trusts in his own self righteousness has created an impenetrable barrier to salvation that must be torn down and abandoned before this person can be saved.

The Moralist thinks that God must show him favor compared to the person that lives in complete unbelief. This is the person that things Judgment Day will be a time when God puts all the good and moral things this person has done on one side of the eternal scale of justice and all the evil, immoral things on the other side. As long as the good outweighs the bad, this person will be allowed to enter into Heaven. This person needs to be confronted with the absolute ridiculousness of this kind of thinking and be shown the truth of God’s Word regarding his/her condemnation.

Expect a struggle when working to bring the Moralist to Christ (v 5). The Moralist needs to be taught that his Moralism is actually an offense against God. “Hardness” is from the Greek word *sklerotes* (sklay-rot'-ace) meaning obstinate or stubborn. “Impenitent” is from the Greek word *ametanoetos* (am-et-an-o'-ay-tos) meaning an unwillingness to change the mind, unrepentent.

“Heart” is from the Greek word *kardia* (kar-dee'-ah) referring to the center of all physical and spiritual life. The word “after” is from the Greek word *kata* (kat-ah') meaning down from or according to. As a result of his being obstinate and unwilling to change his mind about his Moralism, verse 5-10 will become the reality of this person’s everyday existence.

This person views his moral lifestyle as a storehouse of good things that give him favor with God. The reality is just the opposite. In reality, he has created a treasure house of wrath, not favor. In reality, he is not closer to God, but farther away. There is no doubt that the person described in Romans 1:18-32 is lost.

“⁹ And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: ¹⁰ Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. ¹¹ The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men *are*, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. ¹² I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. ¹³ And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as *his* eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. ¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted” (Luke 18:9-14).

Notice in Luke 18:9 the truth that reveals a self-righteous person. He not only trusts in his own righteousness for access and favor with God; He also “despised others.” In other words, he views anyone else with contempt that does not measure up to his standard of self righteousness. Truly saved people know enough about their own unrighteousness apart from Christ that they would never look on other sinners with contempt, but rather in compassion.

The Moralist thinks that because he restrains his carnal tendencies, he is assured of heaven. Not so! Every added attempt at self righteousness adds to God’s contempt for this person’s insults against God’s holiness. Even though the Moralist may not outwardly commit the things discussed in Romans 1:18-32, that is what he is inside (in his heart, spiritually). God wants us to recognize what we are in our nature (heart).

“The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked: who can know it” (Jeremiah 17:9)?

Everything coming from a corrupted source is corrupt. No one wants to drink water run from a sewer pipe. That water has been corrupted by the vehicle through which it is transported. So it is true of anyone’s so called *good works*. Until God’s grace has cleansed us from sin, everything that comes from us is corrupted by that sin.

“¹⁷ Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither *can* a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit” (Mathew 7:17-18).

The universal principle is that God is a God Who rewards good. The ultimate reward is “eternal life” (v 7). However, as in the case of all men, this must be understood in context.

“¹⁰ As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: ¹¹ There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. ¹² They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one” (Romans 3:10-12).

Yes, God rewards men for good deeds, but doing good apart from the outworking of the Holy Spirit is impossible. Only God is good and therefore only God can do good deeds. Therefore, according to the context, no man deserves reward on the basis of “good deeds,” but contrarily (v 6) his “good deeds” bring the condemnation of verse 9 on every man.

Since man’s righteousness is found only in Christ and a righteous act can only be accomplished by a Holy Spirit indwelt and filled believer, verses 7 and 10 can only be applied to those already saved. These verses cannot be applied to doing these things as a means to be saved.

The universal principle is that God is a God Who punishes evil (verses 8-9). “Contentious” is from the Greek word *eritheia* (er-ith-i'-ah) referring to self promotion. It denotes a self-seeking pursuit of political office by unfair means. The idea is that those who seek position before God based upon their own self righteous acts work to their own detriment. The first truth that must be obeyed is the truth about our own unrighteousness before God. Obedience to that truth brings us before God on our faces in repentance, pleading for mercy.

“¹³ And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as *his* eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. ¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted” (Luke 18:13-14).

To “obey unrighteousness” (Romans 2:8) means to obey our own self will (sin nature) as it chases after temptation and sin. The first act of acceptable and rewardable obedience is when a person obeys the gospel and calls on the Name of Jesus to save his wretched soul. The gospel dogmatically states that the only way to be saved is to believe only and completely in what Jesus did to save us.

The vast majority of professing Christianity believes in salvation through a mixture of the work of Christ at Calvary, a person's own Moralism and some degree of participation in various religious rituals. None of these are viable approaches to a righteous God. In fact, any degree of such nonsense closes the door of access to God. Such a view is an insult against both God's righteousness and His grace.

This kind of approach to God is much more than a mild offense against His character creating a mild reaction on God's part. God's response to such a defense will be very severe. The person who seeks God's favor through any other avenue than the righteousness of Christ and salvation by grace through faith in the work of Christ alone will find a big surprise when he stands before God with his treasure chest of self righteousness and good works. Instead of reward, he will find:

1. "Indignation:" *thumos* (thoo-mos'), fierce passionate anger
2. "Wrath:" *orge* (or-gay'), punishment
3. "Tribulation:" *thlipsis* (thlip'-sis), trouble
4. "Anguish:" *stenochoria* (sten-okh-o-ree'-ah), a narrow place with no where to turn or escape.

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1. What is the second principle of divine justice from Romans 2:5-10? _____

2. Discuss why Romans 2:5 is a connecting link between judgment according to truth (Romans 2:1-4) and judgment according to works (Romans 2:6-10). _____

3. Discuss why a Christian should expect a struggle when trying to bring a Moralist to saving knowledge of Jesus Christ and what the area of struggle will be. _____

4. The Moralist views his life as a treasure chest of righteous deeds that will bring him favor with God. According to Romans 2:5, what is God's view? _____

5. Read Matthew 7:17-18 and Jeremiah 17:9 together. What fruit comes from a corrupt tree? Apply this principle to anything which comes from a fallen or carnal nature. _____

6. Discuss the universal principle of Romans 2:7 comparing it in context to Romans 3:10-12. _____

7. Discuss the universal principle of Romans 2:8-9 comparing it to the truth of Luke 18:9-14 and your understanding of the Greek word translated "contentious." _____

8. How does a person "obey unrighteousness"? _____

9. Discuss the first act of rewardable obedience and what is involved in it. _____

10. What are the rewards for a person who seeks God's favor through any avenue other than the righteousness of Christ and salvation by grace through faith in the finished work of Christ alone? _____
